

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L THESSALONIKI 0488

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ECEM, SENV, PGOV, ELAB, GR

SUBJECT: DEADLINE SET FOR REMOVAL OF ETHYL HELLAS

STORAGE FACILITIES FROM THESSALONIKI PORT

REF: THESSALONIKI 0348

1. SUMMARY. THESSALONIKI PORT WORKERS STAGED BRIEF WILDCAT STRIKE AUGUST 4 DEMANDING REMOVAL OF FOUR ETHYL HELLAS STORAGE TANKS FROM PORT AREA. WORKERS ALLEGED THAT EMISSIONS FROM TANKS CREATED HEALTH HAZARD. WORK RESUMED WHEN MINISTER OF COORDINATION PAPALIGOURAS PROMISED THAT ETHYL AND ALL OTHER CHEMICAL STORAGE FACILITIES WOULD BE REMOVED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. ETHYL MANAGING DIRECTOR AMOLOCHITIS TOLD POL/ECON OFFICER AUGUST 8 THAT MINISTER HAS SINCE WRITTEN COMPANY SETTING 9-MONTH DEADLINE FOR TANKS' TRANSFER. AMOLOCHITIS INTENDS REPLY THAT MINIMUM OF 18 MONTHS WILL BE REQUIRED FOR MOVE AFTER NEW SITE HAS BEEN SELECTED, AND EVEN THIS FIRST STEP HASN'T BEEN TAKEN. END SUMMARY.

2. ETHYL HELLAS HAS FOUR STORAGE TANKS ON PIER 5 IN THESSALONIKI PORT. TANKS USED FOR TEMPORARY STORAGE OF LEAD ANTI-KNOCK COMPOUND PRIOR TO EXPORT. PRESSURE FOR THEIR REMOVAL, WHICH HAS BEEN BUILDING SINCE 1970, CONFIDENTIAL

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INITIALLY CAME FROM MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, WHICH ALLEGED THAT TANKS CONSTITUTED SECURITY HAZARD IN EVENT OF MILITARY CONFLICT. THIS PRESSURE INTENSIFIED FOLLOWING CYPRUS CRISIS, AND IN LATE JUNE 1975, MINISTER

OF DEFENSE AVEROFF, AFTER MEETING WITH ETHYL HELLAS OFFICIALS, WROTE COMPANY THAT HIS MINISTRY'S POSITION ON ISSUE WAS THAT: (1) TANKS SHOULD BE REMOVED AS SECURITY HAZARD, (2) THIS SHOULD BE DONE AS SOON AS FEASIBLE, AND (3) UNTIL THEY WERE REMOVED THEY COULD CONTINUE OPERATING.

3. IN THE MEANTIME, MORE INSISTENT AND VOCAL PRESSURE WAS BUILDING FROM PORT WORKERS WHO IN LATE MAY BEGAN ALLEGING THAT VARIOUS ILLNESSES SUFFERED BY WORKERS WERE CAUSED BY EMISSIONS INTO ATMOSPHERE FROM THE ETHYL TANKS. COMPANY FIRMLY DENIES THIS, POINTING OUT THAT TANKS HAD BEEN OPERATING FOR 8 1/2 YEARS WITHOUT ANY PROBLEMS BEFORE THIS CHARGE WAS RAISED. IN EARLY JUNE, MINISTER OF NORTHERN GREECE MARTIS AGREED THAT NO HEALTH HAZARD EXISTED, BUT IN ORDER TO PLACATE WORKERS, IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE LEVEL OF LEAD EMISSIONS IN THE AIR WOULD BE MONITORED BY A THESSALONIKI UNIVERSITY TEAM UNTIL SUCH TIME AS ETHYL WAS ABLE TO REMOVE TANKS. WITH THIS PROVISION, WORK HAS BEEN GOING ON UNTIL THE AUGUST 4 STRIKE.

4. ACCORDING TO AMOLOCHITIS, ETHYL IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY AIR OR OTHER POLLUTION FROM ITS FACILITIES IN THE PORT. HOWEVER, AS A RESULT OF MINISTRY OF DEFENSE PRESSURE AND TO AVOID FURTHER PROBLEMS WITH THE WORKERS, IT WILL AGREE TO REMOVE THE TANKS. ETHYL, HOWEVER, FEELS IT MUST WAIT UNTIL THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND COORDINATION, IN CONJUNCTION WITH ETHYL, SELECTS AN ALTERNATE SITE AND THIS IS NOW ONLY IN THE PLANNING STAGES. IN THIS SITUATION, AMOLOCHITIS FEELS IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET THE UNEXPECTEDLY SHORT DEADLIN

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IDCF MINISTER PAPALIGOURAS.

5. COMMENT: AIR POLLUTION AND POSSIBILITY OF LEAD POISONING FROM ETHYL TANKS IS EMOTIONAL ISSUE IN THESSALONIKI WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN EXPLOITED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. CONFIDENTIAL

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FOR EXAMPLE, CITY COUNCIL OF TRIANDRIA, A PREDOMINATELY WORKERS' COMMUNITY WITHIN THESSALONIKI METROPOLITAN AREA, HAS USED ISSUE TO GET IN PRESS WITH DEMANDS FOR REMOVAL OF ALL ETHYL INSTALLATIONS FROM COUNTRY. NINE-MONTH DEADLINE, IF IT BECOMES PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OR IS NOT RELAXED, COULD HEIGHTEN THESE ACTIVITIES, GIVEN ETHYL'S CONTENTION THAT IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO MOVE IN THAT SHORT A TIME. BRENNAN

NOTE: #AS RECEIVED.

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